“What should good student writing at this grade level look like?”

The answer lies in the writing itself.

The Writing Standards in Action Project uses high quality student writing samples to illustrate what performance to grade level standards looks like—in action.

Grade 4
English Language Arts

Inform / Explain
(Essay)

Living with Asperger’s Syndrome
Background Information

Writing Sample Title:
Living with Asperger’s Syndrome

Text Type and Purpose: Inform/Explain
Grade level/Content area: Grade 4 English Language Arts
Type of Assignment: Essay (for newspaper column)
Standards Addressed: (W.4.2), (W.4.3), (W.4.5), (L.4.1), (L.4.2), (L.4.3)

See descriptions of these standards in the right column of the next page.

Highlights:
This sample of student work meets grade level standards. It demonstrates the following attributes of effective writing.

The sample:
• Focuses on a concise but effective central idea
• Includes short paragraphs and sentences of varied complexity to make ideas flow easily
• Contains interesting short statements to gain the reader’s attention
• Uses well-placed questions to direct the reader’s attention to important concepts
• Blends concrete details and personal experiences to explain what it means to live with Asperger’s Syndrome
• Includes appropriate transitions to focus the reader’s attention on the topic
• Exhibits a lively voice and style to connect with the reader

STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

The student writing sample that follows includes standards-based commentary. The commentary found in this column describes how the writing meets the standards in the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy (2017) and other content frameworks when applicable.

Understanding the Standards-Based Commentary

1. Grade-specific standards addressed are:
   • Listed in the column to the right of student work by strand, grade, and number (or number and letter, where applicable)
   • Marked by a colored block with a letter code, also in the column to the right of student work
   EXAMPLE: A

2. Colored arrow blocks beneath each standard in the right column:
   • Are of the same color and letter code as the block that marks the standard being addressed
   • Mark standards-based commentary related to the standard being addressed
   • Appear in alphabetical order
   EXAMPLE: A1

3. Corresponding colored arrow blocks within the text:
   • Set off sections of student work to which commentary applies
   • Do not necessarily appear in alphabetical order—but where evidence of a particular standard exists
   EXAMPLE: (begin) A1 section A1 (end)
Instructional Practices:
The teacher used the following practices:
• Writing workshop model, including mini-lessons followed by practice
• Writing process: draft, revise, edit, and publish
• Student generated ideas
• Filing system to organize ideas on a topic
• Use of personal anecdotes to develop a topic
• Discussion of model essays written by other students and adults

Assignment Description:
After a presentation on writing by a reporter from the local newspaper, students gathered ideas and selected an essay topic in order to write their own newspaper column. Students organized their ideas and drafted personal essays that they then revised, edited and prepared for publication. Writing produced by six of the finalists, including this sample, was selected for publication as part of a guest series in the newspaper.

Intended Audience:
Peers, parents, teachers, and the newspaper audience

Time:
1 month or more—including time for multiple drafts/revision and work on other assignments

Writing Process:
Alone; with peer feedback; topic chosen by student; drafting; revising; self-editing; peer-editing/peer response

Materials:
Graphic organizers, chart paper

Please note:
The samples may contain inaccuracies in wording and content or shortcomings in the use of standard English conventions.
Living with Asperger’s Syndrome

Social Skills. What’s that? It’s the worst nightmare ever.

Reasons why? That’s easy.

Well, I am not your average child. I am 9 years old and I have something called Asperger’s Syndrome. What’s that? It’s kind
It doesn’t need a cure because it doesn’t do any harm.

I bet you are wondering how it is kind of like a disease if it doesn’t do any harm. Well, I am sure you’ve heard of autism. It’s just like that only a lot less severe. It just changes my behavior.

So let’s talk about what types of things affect me and lots of other people because of Asperger’s Syndrome.

First of all, it makes it ten times easier and more likely for me to have a temper tantrum or a meltdown. One example is when I was four or five years old, I punched my mom! I also had about ten meltdowns a day.

But that’s not all.

The second way I am affected is that it makes me do weird things. It’s just like that only a lot less severe. It just changes my behavior.

Writing. Grade 4, Standard 2: (continued)

B  W.4.2.b
Develop the topic with facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples related to the topic.

B  B Examples:  1 · 2
The writer skillfully develops the topic (living with Asperger’s Syndrome) with concrete details of his experiences: (I punched my mom, …one word that drives me crazy is “great”… When I hear it, I have to move my hands like I am climbing a wall).

C  W.4.2.d
Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.

C  C Examples:  1 · 2
The writer uses precise language to inform the reader: (Well, I am not your average child. I am 9 years old and I have something called Asperger’s Syndrome. What’s that? It’s kind of like a disease but not quite. … I am sure you’ve heard of autism. It’s just like that only a lot less severe. It just changes my behavior).

Writing. Grade 4, Standard 3:

D  W.4.3.b
Use dialogue and description to develop experiences or events or show responses to situations.

D  D Examples:  1
The writer describes his experiences developing his social skills, offering a graphic description of how he feels when the word “great” drives him crazy: (I feel like a house flattened by an F5 twister).
things. When I hear certain words, I have to do certain movements. For example, one word that drives me crazy is “great.” When I hear it, I have to move my hands like I am climbing a wall.

If I don’t do it within 30 seconds, I feel like a house flattened by an F5 twister.

In second grade, when this all began, I literally HAD to do it. My teacher even made me sit on my hands.

There is one last thing I would like to tell you about.

It isolates me.

What does that mean? Here’s a hint: It has to do with conversation. It makes it very hard to talk to other children my age.

Want an example? When I went to the cafeteria, to
wait for school to start, I couldn’t say a word without being teased.

I lied. There is one more thing I want to tell you. I am able to cope with it. That’s why all these stories are from the past.

Today, I am in many groups. I’m in chorus and math club. In chorus we sing and, I get along well. In math club we do challenging math. I get along well there to.

The future is an unknown and mysterious place. No one knows what will happen in it. You could die in one minute, or live for a hundred years. What do you think mine will be?

Language. Grade 4, Standard 1:

L.4.1.a
Produce complete sentences, using knowledge of subject and predicate to recognize and correct inappropriate sentence fragments and run-on sentences.

H Examples: 1 · 2 · 3
The writer uses purposeful sentence fragments to enhance the effectiveness of the piece: (Social skills… Reasons why?… Want an example?).

Language. Grade 4, Standard 2:

L.4.2
Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

I Examples: 1 · 2
The writer effectively and correctly uses a variety of punctuation including contractions, commas, and question marks. The writer correctly punctuates purposeful sentence fragments: (Social skills… Reasons why?).

Language. Grade 4, Standard 3:

L.4.3.a
Choose words and phrases to convey ideas precisely.

J Examples: 1
The writer conveys his ideas precisely in sentences: (First of all, it makes it ten times easier and more likely for me to have a temper tantrum or a melt-down).